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ABSTRACT

The "back to basics" movement has mistakenly pushed drama to the periphery of the school program. Direct communication of verifiable facts, once again so valued, actually militates against the personal creation of meaning. Always subjective, meaning develops through individuals' active encounters with events or situations--never through detachment. Providing children with the opportunity to react honestly to novel situations, drama encourages the creation of personal meaning. Not merely a cognitive skill but a process involving the whole person, dramatic play requires that students at once identify with the characters they are playing and recognize that they are acting a role. Thus it fuses subjective and objective understanding. By helping children to conceive of and experience their own feelings and to reflect on them, drama encourages the creation of true symbols. Only through the use of true symbols is the creative conferring of meaning achieved. (MM)

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SOME CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS OF TEACHING DRAMA

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INTRODUCTION

Although Drama is an accepted feature of the school curriculum it is conceived as increasingly peripheral to the mainstream. The conservatism which is prevalent in the wider community is echoed in the schools through the "back to basics"movement and the emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. Using a simple mathematical equation that the more time spent on the direct teaching of these skills will necessarily lead to their quicker and more competent acquisition, has led the so-called peripheral subjects to be forced into stringent competition for the little time available. In many cases Drama has lost, and has been removed from the curriculum entirely.

As well as an emphasis on literacy and numeracy there has been a resurgence in a traditional curriculum model (Blackford (1978)) which is characterized by subject matter which is firstly intrinsically worthwhile and, secondly, removed from and external to the students. It is firstly the contention of this paper that the notion of objectivity which is inherent in this type of curriculum denies the creation of meaning between the student and the content. And, secondly, that identification and empathy, which are the basic components of Drama, are totally central to this concept of the creation of meaning. Consequently in any curriculum which emphasizes real understanding by the students, Drama must be its basis.

The paper will review the concept of objectivity and contrast it with the notion of the creation of meaning through Drama. A number of the dominant styles of Drama teaching will be cited to illustrate the theory. It will also be argued that creativity within the curriculum is synonomous with the endowment of meaning; and rather than being phenomenologically different than the ordinary process of learning, the difference is one of quality.

...

THE CULT OF OBJECTIVITY

A prevalent assumption in traditional curricula is that the world is made up of a vast series of verifiable facts which are governed by a series of complex and intricate natural laws. The facts are seen to be irrefutable, constant and objective. They exist in both time and space and any meaning which they might contain is intransigent in that it exists whether there is a knower or not. Thus in curriculum terms, knowledge is viewed as an objective and truthful commodity which can be directly passed on from the teacher to passive students. There is an emphasis on facts which are entities in themselves which are neither interrelated nor fitted into a world view or gestalt. Thus it is reductionist and particular.

This mechanistic model is best exemplified by Pierre de Laplace's (1824) contention that all meaning could be reduced to knowledge of the laws governing atomic motion. A more recent adherent to this type of view is B.F. Skinner (1961). In this case all human knowledge is reduced to presence of stimuli and their resulting responses.

David Best (1978) defending the notion of objectivity in the arts, does however state that the popular assumption that the sciences deal with irrefutable facts which exist independently of human conception is a myth. Myth or not, it is the basis of a discipline approach to education in which success is accounted as the acquisition of specified facts, or skills related to an external body of knowledge.

Discussing the case against rigid objectivity, Roger Poole (1972) maintains that it is the totality of conceived opinion: that which is desirable/not desirable, good/not good, important/not important etc. Thus he affirms the concept of objectivity is not only the expression of the status quo of a particular society but is also active in its maintenance.

...

Detachment which is a corollary to objectivity reduces action, supports a social order and militates against the personal creation of meaning. Objectivity is thus a mechanism of control.

SUBJECTIVE MEANING

Poole goes on to assert that the creation of meaning is the antithesis of objectivity. Nothing, in Poole's terms, is ever fixed but, rather, everything is subject to the meaning an individual endows upon it. To illuminate his concept of subjectivity he goes on to provide a critique of convential objectivity. Firstly, any fact which is taken to be true, evident or obvious is always a response to the viewer's perspective, disposition and attitude. Secondly, this perspective is a "distortion of the facts", however, as it is the method by which the individual perceives it is neither open to nor under scrutiny. Thirdly, objectivity requires a selection of facts and this occurs on the basis of support for the particular perspective held. Consequently an individual will endow any fact or situation with an ethical or value import which becomes its meaning.

This understanding of the concept of meaning is extended in the work of Michael Polanyi (1975). Anything which is perceived has no intrinsic meaning; however, meaning can only be created through the use of, what he calls, a "from-to" relationship. The fact, object or situation is used to direct attention away from itself, to a personal conception of its meaning. It is a three stage process beginning with the functional relationship between the perceiver and the perceived. The latter is then transcended through the use of imagination until the "semantic aspect" or meaning is formulated. Implicit within the process is the paradox, however, that although objects do not inherently possess any meaning their presence is necessary for meaning to be created.

...

D.W. Winnicott (1971) documented the existence of this paradox in the behaviour of very young children and sees it as crucial to the later creativity of the individual. Through the use of what Winnicott calls "transitional objects" the child moves from universal omnipotence to the first "not-me" experience. The child paradoxically creates an object by endowing it with meaning, but it could not have been "created" unless it had not already existed in the environment. The relationship between the object and the child is neither purely subjective nor objective; but rather a precarious oscillation is set up between the two. Polanyi, dealing more generally with the nature of meaning, dispenses with the physicality of objects and replaces them with a notion of imaginative projection. The individual transcends the object by incorporating it into himself. This is, however, neither absolute nor complete as the object is endowed with meaning. It is this creation of meaning which maintains the oscillation between the subjectivity/objectivity and the me/not me dichotomies. This is the process of Drama.

DRAMA: THE BASIS OF SUBJECTIVITY

It is maintained that Drama is firstly a situation in which an individual projects himself into imaginary situations and roles. Secondly, this projection occurs through an identification with the imagined situation or person. Identification in this instance is the process of an individual conceiving within himself all states and ranges of behaviour, even those in which he is not involved. The pacifist, therefore, must conceived of acting violently; and the person alive must conceive of the state of death. This notion of identification does not in essence require action - it only requires conception. (Identification is viewing the world from a number of different points of view simultaneously.) Behaviour is not prescribed but rather chosen because of its appropriateness to a particular situation.

Identification with a different mode of behaviour is neither a denial of the self nor a dismissal of the new action as lacking credibility or viability (as is the case with stereotypes). Rather it is the real self-conception of the person acting in this novel fashion. The person must see himself within the role. An exploration of the process of role taking may make this notion of identification clearer.

When faced with an "alien" role to play, the student must firstly discover the basic point of similarity between himself and that role. (Stanislavski (1937) suggested that this could be achieved through a series of techniques which relied on the matching of the emotional import of the role with the emotional memory of the student.) This is the basic point of identification. Secondly, the student must extend this analogical similarity to more fully encompass the role. This can be achieved by utilising his objective experience of both the role and the context in which it is placed. Thus a dynamic oscillation between subjective and objective responses is established. The role is thus never totally subjective, which would deny the context and self of the student. Nor is it totally objective, which would manifest itself in a stereotype.

The third aspect of Drama is that the identification must be pursued to the point of empathy. Thus, using this model, the student involved in Drama is always essentially playing himself - it is a matter of finding himself within a new role or situation.

There is a marked similarity between this conception of Drama and the notion of subjectivity as pursued by Polanyi and Poole. For the use of tacit understanding and for the state of personal knowledge to be achieved, Polanyi stresses the notion of "indwelling".

...

It is only by entering into another person's situation and judging his actions from within his criteria and point of view can an individual gain insights into, and totally appreciate, that person's actions. He states "All knowing is personal knowing - through indwelling".(p44) He goes on to state that through this process of indwelling or identification, an individual makes existential changes to himself. It is the use of creative imagination through identification that modifies the perspective of the self, as it has to accommodate an increasing diversity of possible modes of behaviour.*

Example 1: A group of students was to explore the notion of punishment and discipline. Two quotations were written on the blackboard: "Let the punishment fit the crime" and "All punishment is in itself evil".

The students were asked what both meant, and a discussion as to the literal meanings ensued. The teacher then asked the reasons why they were ever punished and whether they thought this justified. What type of punishments were used for what type of misdemeanours? The students were asked if any of them had younger brothers or sisters, and if they ever had to look after them. It was then discussed whether these younger siblings ever irritated the older students. Did the students ever become so irritated that they wanted to, or actually did, punish their younger charges?

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*This section will be illustrated by a number of examples of units of work in Drama, all of which have been observed during this year.

> The class was then directed back to the two quotations and asked to break off into smaller groups and improvise a scene around the concept of one or both statements. When finished, these were shown. After each scene the whole class was involved in a discussion which endeavoured to crystallize the experience. Topics such as fairness of punishment, reasons for punishment, reaction to giving and getting punishment, and severity of the crime were discussed.

In this class the teacher has endeavoured to firstly focus the students' attentions on the area under scrutiny. Secondly, she has asked them to remember times when they have been both administering and taking some form of punishment. The highly subjective form of questioning was designed to help the students identify and empathise (or in Polanyi's terms "reflexively indwell by forming a full conviviality with our subject") with both roles. Thirdly, this was objectified by again returning to the quotations; and, fourthly, it was placed in a full reflective context by the end discussion. This class constantly wavered between an objective and subjective state which allowed for identification and empathy. Both roles were real and both understandings became part of the student.

This essentially dramatic projection through identification and empathy should not only be evident in human interaction to create meaning. It should characterize, in Polanyi's view, all encounters including those of science. The process of tacit understanding is the same. He goes on to state: "We can know the emotional and intellectual life of animals only by an even deeper indwelling, deep enough to achieve an empathy with their consciousness". (p143) Even the most objective science needs to involve the interpretative perspective of the observer.

...

It was stated earlier in this paper that objectivity is reductionist in nature whereas subjectivity addresses itself to the whole gestalt. In the following example the teacher does not understand this situation.

> Example 2: The teacher had placed a variety of clothes singly around the room. As the students entered they were told to stand behind one. (The teacher controlled who stood behind which piece.) They were then asked to put it on and to think silently about the <u>type</u> of person who would wear this piece of clothing. After a few minutes they were asked to walk around the room as the character they had chosen. Gradually they were to meet other characters and begin various interactions.

In this particular class the "characterization" never really developed; the pieces of clothing were not acting (in Winnicott's terms) as transitional objects; they were mainly hindrances to the normal antics of the students. There was no effort to allow the students to encounter, and create meaning for, the piece of clothing; thus neither insights could have been gained about it, nor could it have acted as a symbol for a deeper more conceptual meaning. It was imposed on to the students as a totally unrelated fact.

One of the major differences between objectivity and subjectivity is the necessity for commitment in the latter, and the prevalence of detachment in the former. Involvement in a particular subjective view of existence is totally pre-conditional, in Polanyi's terms, to any understanding or the gaining of any insight in either the sciences or the arts. Involvement or commitment to a particular world view is the means by which sense is made of any new experience. This pre-condition to seeing is firstly subjective and, secondly, essentially peculiar to each individual.

(There is, however, the possibility of any society, group or sub-group sharing a commitment to the same world view. This will be discussed below under the notions of ritual and shared symbol systems.)

Poole takes up the notion of commitment and its centrality to the subjective creation of meaning. Utilizing the term "intentionality" he maintains that every individual is committed to a certain understanding of the world which is their hypothesis for interpreting and drawing meaning from any situation. It is this personal commitment or intentionality which provides the reconciliation between subjectivity and objectivity. It is necessary to subjectively understand the intentionality before the manifestations of this commitment can be objectively scrutinized. Alluding to John Hopkins' television series Talking To A Stranger (1967), Poole draws attention to one way in which this can occur. He states:

> "Four people, four stories, four sets of eyes, four temporal and emotive histories, four 'accounts' of the same events, four interpretations of the same events, interwoven in four plays. What the viewer or reader of these four plays finally comes to is not 'the truth', 'the facts', but four ways of seeing 'the truth' and four experiences of 'the facts'....Hopkins' work....is this care for the level of perspectival evidence, the arrangement of significances, the slow, patient effort at multiple unravelling.
>
> Whichever way one comes at the task, then, the organization of perspectives will form the major part of any subjective thinking. The major difficulty is in deciding which interpretations of the world are significant in respect to which others." (pp132-133)

...

When dealing with different perspectives or intentionalities, it is necessary for an individual to conceive these within the feasible realm of his own actions. That is, he must conceive of commitment to any of these different points of view. The practice of Drama lends contextual support to the development of this inclusive self conception.

Example 3: The following is a brief description of a unit of work which endeavoured to explore the notion of dependence, independence and responsibility in a family situation in which one member is handicapped.

The teacher brought in a number of mock census forms which were distributed to the class. Each item (dealing with such things as age, sex, employment, religion etc) was discussed. Reasons for inclusion on the census form were also talked about. Under an item which dealt with handicapped people, the teacher asked the students firstly what it meant, secondly why it would be included and thirdly whether any of them had had any contact with handicapped people.

This lead to a discussion as to the type of ailments which could legitimately be called a "handicap". This part of the lesson firstly endeavoured to place the concept of handicaps within a social context and, secondly, to utilize the experiences the students had within the area.

The students were then asked to break into small "family" groups and to fill out the census form. The handicapped member of the family was not present at this stage.

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The teacher, in the role of the census collector, visited each family to answer any queries, give support to the tentative role-taking of the students and to draw out the deeper implications of both the census categories and the students' answers.

The students were asked to write down individually all the things which they normally do between getting up in the morning and going to school which would be hampered or made impossible if they themselves had possessed the handicap which they had written on the census form. These things were discussed and shared amongst the whole class.

In this part of the class there has been a move from the general notion of handicaps to the effect such an affliction would have on the everyday lives of the individual.

In the next class the students were asked to work in pairs. One was blindfolded. The other led the first around the room. This was repeated but with no physical contact. The "blind" person had to recognize their partner's voice for direction. Obstacles were placed in the way and with the general "hubbub" greater differentiation of stimuli became necessary. Roles were reversed throughout. A discussion ensued as the quality of "feeling" which had been present.

This class had aimed at simulating the "feeling" of a handicap through sense deprivation.

...

In the next class the students, in their family groups, were asked to choose somebody to be the person with the handicap. They then had to set up a scene in which the family had an ordinary meal together.

There was considerable effort to couch the first introduction of the handicapped person within the family in a familiar and ordinary setting. The students were then asked to explore a situation in which one member of the family became irritated with another because of something which had either a direct or indirect relationship with the handicap. These scenes were shown and the nature of the irritation, the reasons for it and its validity were discussed. The students were questioned in role by the students who had watched, as to their actions and reactions within the scene.

The notion of medical research was discussed in the next class and the possibilities of curing particular afflictions were talked about. The implications of curing somebody of something, which in most cases they had been born with, were extracted and the students returned to their family groups to discuss in role the advantages and disadvantages of seeking a cure. In the following class each family group was interviewed by two teachers in role representing a social worker and doctor. They were asked about their particular family life and how the handicapped member fitted into it. The risks related to a medical operation were discussed. The students were asked to foresee the changes in their everyday existence if the operation was successful.

This unit of work illustrates the gradual establishment of commitment to different experience perspectives in the students. The teacher created a social context which was strongly related to that which already existed for the students. She then utilized their individual experiences of the particular topic under scrutiny. A shared group experience of a handicap was also created but this "simulation" was used to crystallize the focus of their attention which had been developed in the previous classes. By constantly relating the role to the students' perceived lives, commitment to the role was gradually established. They were playing themselves. With commitment established the students could move into modes of behaviour, intentionalities and experience perspectives which had previously not been within their self concept. Dorothy Heathcote (1966) sums up this situation when she states that Drama is "A real man in a mess!". Although somewhat inadequate because of its succinctness, it does point out that Drama is not a child acting a role, but reacting honestly as himself to the novel situations encountered. If there is no commitment to the Drama, the student's behaviour will be a performance and any implications of the situation, and indeed of his own actions, will be completely missed.

Peter Slade (1954) echoes the same point. From informal observation he noticed that there firstly existed a natural phenomenon which he called Child Drama and, secondly, it was characterized by a deep level of commitment and concentration which he entitled sincerity and absorption. One of the major tasks which Slade advocated as central to Drama teaching was the facilitation of this natural commitment which had a tendency to be lost as the child became older.

...

Unfortunately commitment does not characterize much of the Drama work being pursued in schools. Without commitment stereotypical behaviour is prevalent and learning is either superficial or non-existent. It does not allow for the conferring of meaning on the situation by the individual.

Example 4: The students were asked to what social class they perceived themselves as belonging.

All except one girl repled that they were members of the middle class. (This was a fairly typical suburban high school. The class was a year 10 group of predominantly Australian students. The rest were first or second generation Australians of western European origins.)

The class was asked what differentiated them from the lower or upper class. The students replied in terms of characteristics which could be essentially labelled as behavioural and material. The former included such things as speech patterns and pace of life-style (Lower class: quick, busy and loud. Upper class: languid, relaxed and soft). The latter which were more dominant included clothes, servants or lack of them, and food (Lower class: fish and chips and beer. Upper class: caviar and champagne).

The students were to improvise three scenes each dealing with the situation in which the daughter returns home to say that she is pregnant. Each scene had to deal with one of the broad social class distinctions. The plays dealing with the middle class, because they were based on the conceivable behaviour and the subjective experiences of the students, demonstrated a subtle understanding of familial support, responsibility, expectations and isolation.

...

The scenes themselves were characterized by attention to fine detail, credibility of response and sensitive interaction.

In contrast, the scenes which dealt with the lower and upper classes were crude caricatures derivative of the popular mass media. Attention to detail lapsed (when asked who was the father, the student playing the daughter could not think of a name and made an ineffectual gesture to keep the scene going); and the open interaction between characters was lost. (The student playing Lady Cynthia became so enamoured to the line, "James, pour another sherry!", that this was repeated continually, regardless of what the other characters were saying or doing.)

Commitment was never present in the scenes which dealt with the upper or lower classes. Because the teacher stressed the external manifestations of class behaviour over and above motivation, attitude and intentionality; and the fact that she drew hard and fast distinctions between the students' self-perceptions and the concepts of the two other stratas of society, the students could not have seen their work on the lower and upper classes as in any way subjectively related to themselves. In contrast it was a removed, objectively held reality which was fixed and complete in itself. Consequently it remained a totally intact cliche. It could not by its manifestation challenge the students into the creation of new meaning; rather it is self-fulfilling, as it reinforces itself through repetition.

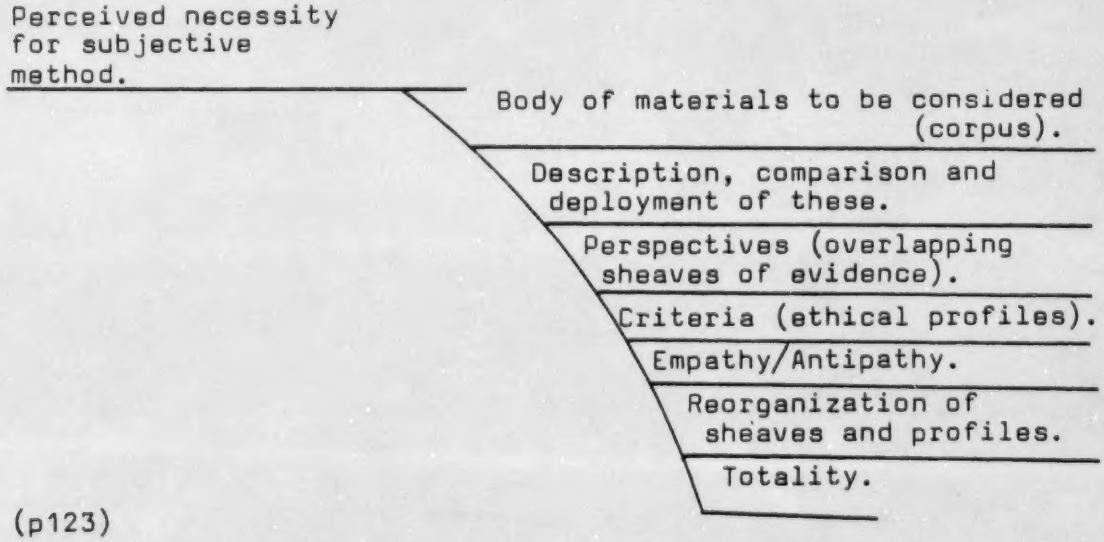
A pre-condition of commitment is the state of empathy. Forming an empathetic relationship with anything, whether it be another person, an animal or a rock, implies seeing the world from that new perspective.

...

It is not purely anthropomorphic as this carries the implication of transferring a human condition to something which is not human. An empathetic relationship works the other way. When an individual "knows" a rock, it is a matter of finding the "rockness" within himself. When understanding another person, the individual must conceive of that person's behaviour within himself.

Having a conceivably possible empathetic relationship with all actions could lead to a position of no action. A true understanding of all moral viewpoints could lead to a total amorality. Because all behaviours are equally accessible to an individual, this could be used for the justification that all behaviours are equally acceptable. When discussing empathy, Poole takes up this point. Inherent within the notion of empathy is the converse yet related notion of antipathy. Both assume a participation in the behaviour which in the former instance is acceptable, whereas in the latter it is unacceptable. Antipathy does not imply an unthinking, removed and total rejection of certain behaviours. In contrast, rejection is based on a tacit choice in full knowledge that the behaviour in question could be conceivably pursued by the individual.

In summing up his thesis on the subjective creation of meaning, Poole describes the process diagramatically:


Perceived necessity for subjective method.
Body of materials to be considered (corpus).
Description, comparison and deployment of these.
Perspectives (overlapping sheaves of evidence).
Criteria (ethical profiles).
Empathy/Antipathy.
Reorganization of sheaves and profiles.
Totality.

(p123)

...

This model could be a useful grid in apprehending and understanding the diverse practices of Drama in education.

Example 5: The following is a very brief description of a unit of work which was pursued over one-and-a-half terms at an outer suburban high school. The students were a diverse group in year 10.

Description	Analysis
Because of the age and diversity of the group the teacher and the class decided to explore the notion of what it was like to be a teenager in this particular area. The teacher brought in a local newspaper article which was highly critical of the "teenage louts" which, it was stated, were prevalent in the area. This was discussed.	The corpus or topic is decided as a joint venture with the students. The parameters of study are set by mutual agreement.
The students then interviewed a variety of local people about their impressions of local teenagers. The class listened to the tapes of the interviews and discussed the implied attitudes.	Much of the work is dealing with different perspectives of the same topic. These were extensively compared and contrasted.
They next investigated teenage "crime". The teacher stated that she wanted to understand the reasons a teenager would commit a crime. The students developed improvised scenes based on personal experiences of teenage troublemakers. What constituted a troublemaker was isolated and discussed on the basis of these scenes.	

...

The teacher introduced the poem Street Gang, and the class worked on a Dramatic interpretation of its issues. A gang was on home territory in the local milk bar; a pair of bikies violate the gang's laws and violence erupts.
In a later class a student brought in an article about a debate which was raging locally. Local residents were enraged by a proposal to build a teenage reform home in a high-status suburban street.
Over several sessions they developed a long improvisation exploring the issues and reasons for the expressed attitudes. They alternated in role, as the teenagers involved, as cottage parents, residents, councillors and journalists.

The teacher is asking for an empathetic relationship to be established between the students and people who represent behaviours which do not coincide with their own interests. They are being asked to extend their self concept to include previously "alien" behaviours.

They became increasingly interested in the reasons for behaviour and attitudes. Their work moved outward from their own experience to encompass teenage protest and dissatisfaction in a broader social context. This awareness was developed into a satire about protest groups and taking up causes.

The students are beginning to move away from manifest behaviour and towards the notion ethical profiles.

A group wrote some songs; another group interviewed and researched teenagers in the area who had left home.
A girl wrote a fable about growing up and gaining independence from parents.

with the emergence of form, there is a reorganization of the perspectives and profiles.

There is a gradual moving towards an understanding of the totality of the topic.

...

Feeling that boredom and lack of facilities were central to the "problem" of teenagers, the group wrote a collective letter to the council.

As the unit progressed, the students felt a need to crystallize and give form to the experience which they had gone through. They decided to work towards a performance; and it was the performance which acted as a true symbol for their work in that it facilitated the conception of their multifarious responses to the particular topic.*

(see: Langer (1962))

The tentative expression of form spirals towards discovery of a true symbol (ie the performance), which not only helps the students conceive their feeling experiences but also recalls these experiences with an immediacy and vividness which allows reflection upon their own feelings.

(see: Witkin (1974))

Thus self knowledge is facilitated.

The use of symbol is very important in the creation of meaning through Drama. Susanne Langer (1962) maintains that a symbol allows, with the use of projection, the conception of any feeling state. She goes on to state that it is an activity not a product which includes both sensation and emotion. Developing this notion (1967) she maintains that feeling and thought are not separate processes but rather exist on the same continuum. Thought is limenal feeling. "Feeling...is the generic basis of all mental experience - sensation, emotion, imagination, recollection and reasoning". (1962) Thus, through the use of symbolic forms an individual can confer subjective meaning on any event or situation.

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* This material is freely adapted from: Donelan, K., "Developing a Drama Programme" in MASK, 1978, with the author's permission.

The expression of Drama should always function as McGregor et al (1977) state as a true expressive symbol. It should facilitate the conception of feeling states which exist within the individual. This participation in expressive symbolic forms enables the individual to transcend the particular day-to-day, mortality based existence in which he finds himself, and to participate in the perpetual life of mankind. Through the symbolization of the everyday an individual is able to encounter the essence of the thing it represents. Robert Witkin (1978) states that it is through the apperception of these essences that "....our common humanity is realized again and again in the endless diversity of human culture".

Addressing himself to works of art (and by implication to symbols in general), Polanyi dismisses the Coleridgian notion of a "willing suspension of disbelief". He states that since symbols facilitate conception they represent certain facts of the imagination and do not affirm facts of experience. He goes on to deal with ritual in a similar fashion. He states: "Since they are essentially unoriginal, we seem to deem them as incapable of expressing genuine feelings and to reject them as shallow pretense. But this, of course, totally misses their point. It is the very artificiality of traditional forms that enables them to act as a framework, detaching the events to which they apply and thus endowing them with a forceful and lasting quality through the work of our own luminous imaginative powers." (p119)

This has been a point which has not readily been grasped by some teachers involved in the pursuit of Drama.

Example 6: Simulation is a Dramatic technique in which the exact situation is replicated in the Drama as it would be in real life. It is preliving on the most realistic scale which can be created.

...

In a year 11 British History class the Drama teacher worked in conjunction with the History teacher to give a deeper understanding of the implications of the Indian Mutiny of 1860. It was decided to give the students a "direct" experience of mutiny so that this could be transferred to the historical setting.

The History teacher entered the class and began to dictate to the students at an increasingly fast rate. There were protests from the students; these were ignored and the pace was increased. Ultimately there was an outright refusal by a group of the students to continue the task (this type of defiance would normally have been severely punished in the particular school). The Drama teacher entered at this point and the experience became the basis for quite interesting role play on the Indian Mutiny.

This type of practice which Gavin Bolton (1978) entitles "conning" is quite common as a Drama technique. It is based on the assumption that the creation of meaning is reality based whereas, as Polanyi states, it is a function of the imagination.

DRAMA: THE BASIS OF KNOWING

It has been argued in this paper that objectivity does not provide an adequate conceptual basis for the creation of meaning. It has also been maintained that meaning is conferred onto a situation or an object by an individual participating in it; and that this process is essentially Dramatic. In educational terms, therefore, Drama should be the basis of any viable curriculum. This statement does however rely on a number of assumptions which are worth isolating as it is on these the specific practices of Drama must be based.

...

1. Events and situation need to be seen as symbols which recall and reflect on an individual's existence. There is a tendency to view the world as objects and facts which bear no relationship to the person. Consequently potential symbols are disassociated from their referrents (that which they symbolize).

2. Truth is never fixed but rather multivalent and shifting. It is intrinsically related to the particular viewpoint, commitment, intentionality and world perspective the individual has. Truth is the individual conferring of meaning on a particular situation. It is at the level of perspective, commitment and intentionality that challenge and discussion should occur and not of their "mouthfull" manifestation, as this is merely their reflection.

3. Values are neither intransigent nor external to the individual. All creation of meaning and its consequent behaviour requires commitment. If an individual can conceive within himself all states and ranges of behaviour, even those in which he is not involved, action becomes a matter of choice. This concept of choice inextricably relates the subjective creation of meaning,and thus Drama, with the notion of ethics. This occurs for two reasons. Firstly, when faced with the possibility of acting within a certain manner an individual must transform that external behaviour so that it is comprehendable within his own self concept. Secondly, in moving from conception to action he must reject certain behaviours as inappropriate. Extending these notions into individual self-determinationsm Poole states:

> "The thinker has to decide not only what is right and wrong but also what he wants to <u>become</u> by deciding the matter this way rather than that way. In deciding what he wants to become, he decides indirectly what he wants his world to become." (p145)

...

4. Through the use of imagination and identification an individual is able to project himself into seeing the world from other perspectives than those which currently affect his behaviour. Although this is a truism, considering what has been stated in the rest of this paper, it is important to state as it is surprisingly quite common for teachers involved in Drama to make comments such as "I can't really communicate with that child because he's from a different culture", or "How can you get a city child to appreciate the country without taking him there?"

Taken to its logical extent, Drama assumes a shared common view of existence in which every individual part is both one and the same thing, and yet differentiated simultaneously. It is the subjective/objective embodiment which Winnicott (1971) sees as so central to the establishment of a creative lifestyle. This point is perhaps best summed up in the XVII Devotion of John Donne when he states:

> "Any man's death diminishes me, because
> I am involved in Mankind; And therefore
> never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
> it tolls for thee."

5. The diverse manifestations of Drama as taught within a formal educational setting (eg see: Hogan (1973)) firstly reflect the wider subjective attitude which has been labelled by this paper as Dramatic. And, secondly, the practise gained within the Drama class gives experience in the creation of subjective meaning which is directly transferrable to all of existence.

This has important implications for structuring of Dramatic experiences. Howard Gardner (1973) states that skills in the arts should not be developed for their own sake, but should be a <u>means</u> by which the participant encounters the feeling states of others.

...

Identification, empathy and commitment are the qualitative characteristics of the encounter.

6. Students gain social meaning through interaction. Although the conferring of meaning is essentially an individual process, a person must take account of the different interpretations which others are placing on the same situation. Thus any spatial interaction carries a multitude of conferred meanings. The spatial relationships between people are capable of carrying as much meaning as what an individual actually says or the manner in which he says it.

7. Drama is not merely a cognitive skill but rather a process which involves the whole individual. It does not allow for a body/mind dichotomy but rather has an inclusive view of the conferring of meaning which is akin to Susanne Langer's (1967) notion of feeling which encompasses anything sensed or known.

Consequently the body through movement and gesture is the means by which meaning is created. Poole takes up this point:

> "...the body is quite evidently the matrix of significant expression. The body's signs are signifiers and the inner world of intention is the signified. In interpreting the signs we work back from the sign to the inner intention which animates them. The body when used expressively is a pure sign and a reliable access to the originating subjectivity offered through it." (p31)

8. Self-knowledge is an essential ingredient and a pre-condition to any knowledge of the external world. Thus each individual is of prime importance within the educational process.

...

Lawrence Kubie (1958) states that without self knowledge "...We can have no adults, but only ageing children who are armed with words and paint and clay and atomic weapons, none of which they understand". (p133)
He goes on to state that this will lead to mere erudition without wisdom.

CREATIVITY: THE CONFERRING OF MEANING

It has been argued in this paper that no event or situation inherently possesses meaning which is objectively discernible. In contrast, meaning is conferred through an active process of encounter between the individual, and the event or situation. All meaning is conferred in this subjective fashion. This is also the process of creativity. The difference between this and an individual's normal functioning in the world is one of quality and not one of process.

When the encounter is characterized by commitment and empathy, the object of the encounter becomes for an individual an original symbol for an aspect of the person. As the individual develops and changes, his creation of meaning must reflect this and be flexible, novel, original and idiosyncratic. It should act as a true symbol in that it should recall the felt experiences of the individual. Creativity is essentially an attitude which is manifested in an openness to experience, spontaneity and appropriateness of action. Conferring of meaning which is rigid, predictable, inflexible and stereotypical is the antithesis of creativity.

This creative conferring of meaning is achieved through the use of true symbols; that is symbols which allow the individual to conceive of his own feeling states and to reflect on these. Thus all true symbols are necessarily creative. It has been argued also in this paper that the process of conferring meaning is Dramatic as it is based extensively on the notions of imagination/pretense, identification and empathy. The flexibility inherent in Drama carries its creative import.

Drama is the means by which meaning is created and the means through which participation in true symbols can occur.

...

Drama is also the means by which creative products are made and creative solutions found. The Dramatic process is the creative process.

EVALUATION: THE SHARING OF SYMBOLS

This paper has firstly maintained that creativity is an individual's conferring of meaning on situations and events which he encounters. Secondly, it has been claimed that this is a subjective process and that so-called objectivity does not provide an adequate understanding of this process. It is only through empathetic identification can meaning be conferred onto a situation or event. Therefore this also must be the process of evaluation.

The only valid criterion for evaluation is whether or not the subjective expression of an individual is functioning as a true symbol for him. David Best (1978) attacking a subjectivist approach to the arts, alludes to a situation in which a group of Dance students, as a performance, simply sat on the studio floor eating crisps. This, in Best's terms, is a totally invalid expression. This rigidity of response shows an inability to even conceive of this behaviour as valid. As stated earlier in this paper, it is important to at least be able to conceive of all behaviours within a particular self-concept and on this level any behaviour is understandable.

In evaluating this form of expression it is necessary to identify and empathize with the particular students to see the event from their point of view. If, from this position, the expression is functioning as a true symbol the "performance" is no less acceptable than any other form. This does not assume, however, that it is necessarily functioning in this fashion. The important point is to conceive that it could.

Evaluation must occur through the teacher participating in the expression through identification and empathy from the point of view of the students. Through this participation the teacher is able to discern whether the expression is functioning as a true symbol for the students.

SUMMARY

This paper has asserted that creativity is the means by which an individual subjectively confers meaning into his existence. Thus creativity is an attitude which is central to a lifestyle rather than relegated to a particular process, or the making of objects, or the finding of solutions - although these can be all part of it.

An objective, mechanistic and reductionist view of the world does not adequately account for the creation of meaning. It has been maintained that only through deep subjectivity can real meaning be created as it fully accounts for the individual's position in the world. The empathetic identification which is the process of Drama is also the process of subjectively perceiving meaning in existence. Consequently Drama is the means of both subjectivity and creativity; without it, meaning is impossible.

The peripheral position which Drama presently occupies within the school curriculum is totally inadequate. If meaning has a priority over social control, Drama should be the basis of any viable curriculum.

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